

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

4-27-1972

The Wrath of God

W. Larry Richards

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#)

THE WRATH OF GOD

By W. L. RICHARDS

MANY wonderful Christians are perplexed when they read the Scripture passages that refer to God's wrath. There is something about the word *wrath*, especially when associated with God, that often elicits an uncomfortable feeling. The word is associated with retribution, anger, punishment, and these terms simply do not readily harmonize in many people's minds with a God whose most prominent characteristic is love, a God who is compassionate and long-suffering.

Is it not true that God is unwilling that any should perish, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked? God's unwillingness that any should perish, however, does not

W. L. Richards is in the Religion Department of Andrews University.

mean, as some would like to believe, that God does not deal with the wicked in a final judgment, a final destruction. The Scriptural emphasis is on the *unwillingness* on God's part that any should perish; nevertheless, the Scriptures mention God's wrath more than one hundred times. What then, is the wrath, and what kind of person receives the wrath?

The clearest Scriptural definition on the wrath of God is found in Romans 1. Paul says in verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed . . ." (R.S.V.). He then proceeds to explain what this revelation of God's wrath is, and in doing this he gives a clear characterization of the person who receives the wrath. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their

wickedness *suppress* the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (verses 18, 19, R.S.V.). In these verses Paul has pointed out that those who receive the wrath are persons who have known the truth but have not responded to it; they have suppressed the clearest revelations of God; they have, in fact, turned away from God, they have given up their knowledge of truth, they have *given up* God. Such a person has "no excuse." Why? "For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him" (verses 20, 21).

The Choice Is Man's

Paul has said that those who are going to experience God's wrath are those who have first of all turned

When You're YOUNG

By Miriam Wood

ON DECISION- MAKING—2

In our column, two weeks ago, we discussed the importance of right decisions, the frightening ordeal decision-making poses for many people, and we suggested the following points:

That a person needs first to formulate a clearly defined set of broad principles by which to guide his life, and that for the Christian the law of God provides these principles.

That before making a decision it is vital to secure all the facts, pro and con. With the facts before him, the decision-maker can view the problem objectively by asking himself what advice he would give his best friend under similar circumstances.

Having gone this far in a reasoned, scientific approach, the decisionee will move on to the next level by asking himself these questions—Do I know anyone else who has faced a similar situation? What did he do? What were the results of his course of action? Since there really is "nothing new under the sun" it shouldn't prove difficult to find living—or at least written—examples of both good and disastrous decision-making.

This step is particularly valuable

when romance is the issue. No other area is so obscured by emotion as this one. Each person basking in the incomparable glow of love, real or counterfeit, tends to lose his ability to be rational, to varying degrees. In his thrall he may run roughshod over every step we've mentioned until this one. But let us say, for example, that he is seriously contemplating marriage with someone who has not his own belief in God. Just one half-hour's review of Biblical episodes of this sort, plus his own acquaintances who're now harvesting their bitter crops, watering them with their tears, just may possibly deter him. After all, we cannot escape history.

Having gone successfully through these processes it is probably time to bring other people into the picture by securing advice from those whose opinion is valuable. Here, though, maturity and good judgment will make it clear (painfully so, at times) that the decisionee must secure impartial viewpoints. "I'm not going to ask him what he thinks because I know what he'll say!" may be just the best reason in the world for asking him. Two words of caution, though: (1) To *start* the decision-making process by asking advice is an

evasion of personal responsibility, an admission of immaturity; (2) Decisions based on sought-for advice become the decision-maker's "property." He's a poor sort of person, indeed, if he repays the interest of another person in his life—the interest he has solicited—by blaming him for disappointing outcomes.

Not necessarily a separate step, but permeating the entire process of good decision-making is reasonable speed. Indefinite postponement usually indicates that the decisionee actually knows what he ought to do but is unwilling to do it. The longer he vacillates, the more time he needs to convince himself to make the correct move.

Last, but actually most important, is the place of prayer in a Christian's decisions. God really does have a plan for the life of each one of His children. He will make this known in a variety of ways when His counsel is asked for. He doesn't always volunteer His advice, though, any more than an intelligent earthly parent does with adult children. And when unfortunate decisions are made, He will help the sincere, if misguided, decisionee to change directions.

Good decisions don't just happen. You have to make them happen.

(Concluded)

from God. Such persons have spurned the Father's loving entreaties. And since man has turned from God, what can God do? Will He force man to accept Him? The only possible response God can make is to permit man to have what he has chosen. Refusing to accept God—the Source of life and genuine happiness—is a refusal to accept life and happiness; it is the acceptance of unhappiness and eventually the second death. This then is the wrath of God, the separation that takes place between God the Creator and man the created *after* man has resisted the mercies of God beyond the point of return. God reluctantly withdraws His mercy—mercy which has been persistently rejected—and man bears the consequence of his rebellion.

This is precisely the language Paul uses to describe the wrath of God. In verses 24, 26, and 28, Paul says three times that God gives up man. Notice particularly the words in italics which emphasize the striking truth that God gives up man *after* man has given up God.

God Gave Them Up

"Therefore God gave them up . . . because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. . . . For this reason God gave them up. . . . And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up" (R.S.V.).

It was said of Jesus that He would drink the "cup of wrath" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 642). The wrath of God that Jesus experienced is forcefully portrayed: "The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. . . . But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The *withdrawal* of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. . . . Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel *when mercy shall no longer plead* for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the *Father's wrath upon Him* as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God."—*Ibid.*, p. 753. (Italics supplied.) The wrath that Christ felt is the wrath that unresponding man must experience if he chooses to be his own sinbearer, if he gives up God.

Another example of God's wrath is seen in the history of the chosen people. In Christ's time the 490 years of Jewish probation mentioned in Daniel 9 were soon to come to a close; but prior to the close of this period the Jewish people were to witness the greatest evidence of all that God wanted to save them. Jesus, God in person, for more than three years provided the most glorious evidences men could ever wish that He wanted to lead them to salvation.

"But Israel *had turned* from her best Friend and only Helper. The pleadings of His love had been despised, His counsels spurned, His warnings ridiculed. The hour of hope and pardon was fast passing: the cup of God's *long deferred wrath* was almost full. . . . He who alone could save them from their impending fate had been slighted, abused, rejected."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 20. (Italics supplied.) When Israel turned from God, He could no longer work through them as a nation. Paul said to the church at Thessalonica many years before the Roman armies overthrew Jerusalem in A.D. 70 that God's wrath had *already* come upon the Jewish people (1 Thess. 2:16). When the 490 years had ended in A.D. 34, the Jewish people *as a nation* were given up.

FOR THE YOUNGER SET

A Little Maroon Hat—Part 2

By MABLE ISAAC

ONE day mother sent Jenny to the post office to collect the mail. Like most little girls, she was always happy to run errands for her mother. She ran along the path, racing with the wind-swept leaves, stopping every now and then to pity a frostbitten marigold or daisy. In a short while she reached the post office.

Climbing on tiptoe, she barely got her eyes above the counter and asked, "Any letters for the Oakleys?"

"No letters," answered the woman behind the desk, "but I think we have a package for you."

Jesus must have sent my hat, thought Jenny.

The clerk handed her a package that was almost as tall as the little girl, though not as wide. Jenny struggled out of the office, trying to figure out how to carry the load up the hill to her house. In a few minutes she had solved the problem. Taking hold of one end, she dragged the package behind her like a toy trolley; she was soon running up the hill.

The paper wrapping began to give way, and Jenny could see something sticking out of the parcel. It was shiny

"In their hatred and cruelty toward the disciples of Jesus they rejected the last offer of mercy. Then God *withdrew* His protection from them and removed His restraining power from Satan and his angels, and the nation was left to the control of the leader she had chosen."—*Ibid.*, p. 28. (Italics supplied.)

In Revelation 14-16 we read of God's wrath being poured out unmixed with mercy upon wicked men in the end of time. Ellen G. White wrote the following significant words about the group of persons who would *not* receive the seal of God: "Their wicked course He will tolerate no longer, and in His wrath He deals with them without mercy. It is with reluctance that the Lord withdraws His presence from those who have been blessed with great light and who have felt the power of the word in ministering to others."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 212. What a sad time it will be for the earth when the loving Lord reluctantly withdraws His presence—when He gives man up!

"We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. . . . But

and looked like the tip of an umbrella.

Mother was busy in the kitchen when Jenny finally got to the house. As she entered, she called, "Mom, I've got an umbrella for you."

"Really?" asked her mother.

"Yes, I can see it peeping out over there. Maybe my hat's inside too."

Mother relieved her of the burden. Together they ripped off the brown paper wrapping. Out tumbled gloves, shoes, socks, and a bag, and sure enough, mother's black umbrella fell out too. Then very close to the umbrella dropped a cute little maroon hat with pretty laces and ribbons on it.

"Jesus has sent my hat," Jenny shouted, as she placed the hat on her head and pranced all over the room as only a little girl with a new hat can prance.

Aunt Alice had had the Oakleys in mind as the winter season approached. She had thought especially of Jenny and had decided to send her a surprise package.

Jenny and mother knelt to thank Jesus for answering her prayer.

(Concluded)

when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. . . . The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left . . . no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 36.

After speaking of Christ's departure from the sanctuary at the close of probation, Ellen G. White states with remarkable clarity: "The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. . . . The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn. Unsheltered by divine grace, they

have no protection from the wicked one. *Satan will then plunge* the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 614. (Italics supplied.)

These references do not teach that God does not destroy; but they do tell us what happens on the earth after God's Spirit has been withdrawn.

"This [destruction of the wicked] is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. . . . God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of

harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 764.

"To sin, wherever found, 'our God is a consuming fire.' Heb. 12:29. In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them. . . . The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked."—*Ibid.*, pp. 107, 108.

The great concern for God's people today should be that the Holy Spirit will consume the sin to which they are prone to cling, that the character of God may be reproduced in them. Then when they see Christ in the judgment it will not be to experience His wrath but to receive His smile of approval. ♦♦

RESPONSE FROM READERS

Tested by the Fruitage

I have recently read *Movement of Destiny*, by L. E. Froom, and have found this to be a monumental work indeed. Vast areas of denominational history have been opened up that have not been available heretofore. While no book written by human beings can be regarded as perfect, I could surely recommend this book to anyone who wants to be abreast of some of these landmarks in our church history. Above all, the precious message of righteousness by faith, the very heart and core of Adventism, becomes exceedingly more precious than ever through the moving history portrayed in this volume. The leading hand of God in the Advent Movement, in spite of the failures of human instrumentalities, is unimpeachable. An appeal is made on pages 373, 374 of the volume to which I would like to respond wholeheartedly:

"Surely the hour has now come to forget the past and its variances, to press together, and to move forward unitedly in response to God's call to advance. Ours is a message of supreme importance to men. Our responsibility is for *today* and its challenges—and for *tomorrow*. A tremendous task devolves upon us. Let us not dissipate our strength through division, and weaken the effectiveness of our testimony by speculative contentions.

"The summons of God is for united effort. Our task will be carried to consummation with the benediction of God, and with Righteousness by Faith in its fullness as the *final* keynote. To participate in this should be our supreme concern."

This book deals very frankly with certain aspects of our denominational history and shows that individuals in important positions have erred seriously at times. But the evidence seems overwhelming to me that charges made by some of denominational apostasy are without foundation. Thank God that we have men in our midst who are vitally concerned about the spiritual condition of our people and are seeing more and more that the answer to our problems lies in the realm of the glorious truth of righteousness by faith. I deeply regret that I have been responsible in the past for circulating certain publications that have given the impression to our people that our leaders were in apostasy from the third angel's message. The integrity of the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church is established beyond question.

Evidence Seems Clear

The evidence also seems clear to me that those who have tried to resolve the Laodicean condition of lukewarmness by launching out in new movements or promulgating some new interpretation of this or that theological point have succeeded only in piling Laodiceanism upon Laodiceanism. Any movement that claims to have advanced light ahead of the church in general must be tested by the fruitage that it brings forth. Note these statements of inspiration:

"Not their profession, but the fruit they bear, shows the character of the tree."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 442.

"We are living in perilous times, and it does not become us to accept every-

thing claimed to be truth without examining it thoroughly; neither can we afford to reject *anything that bears the fruits of the Spirit of God*."—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 35. (Italics supplied.)

"Let everyone beware of unsettling the faith of others by sowing seeds of envy, jealousy, disunion; for God hears the words, and judges, *not by assertions, which are yea and nay, but by the fruit one's course of action produces*. 'By their fruits ye shall know them' (Matt. 7:20). The seed sown will determine the character of the harvest."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 71. (Italics supplied.)

We have wonderful guidelines given in *Selected Messages*, book 1, pages 176-184 for presenting righteousness by faith. These principles will bring unity rather than division and controversy. Righteousness by faith, when received into the life in its beauty and simplicity, will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. I would like to order my life so as to be a unifying rather than a divisive force among God's people. May the Lord work upon the hearts of the honest in heart everywhere so that real unity in Christ will come as never witnessed before in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But for unity to come we must be willing to pay the price:

"If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties. Angels have been grieved and God displeased by the hours which have been spent in justifying self."—*Early Writings*, p. 119.

"As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed."—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 37.

Are we willing to pay the price?

THOMAS DURST

Elkland, Missouri